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The great outdoors beckons

by Cheré Coen

Take it outside, Lafayette!

That's the thinking behind the Great American Backyard Campout Saturday, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. You can pitch a tent in the backyard or visit any of the camping sites located near Lafayette.

June is also Great Outdoors Month, so take a hike as well.

Here are a few suggestions to get you going:

- **Taking in nature is inexpensive, if not free.** It costs only \$10 annually to join the Louisiana Hiking Club, which offers outings throughout the year. And camping can be as cheap as a handful of dollars for a site at a nearby state park, plus a tent, sleeping bags and food. Lake Fausse Point State Park, for instance, has more than 50 campsites, most with water and electrical hookups that cost from \$12 to \$16 a night.



Photo by Cheré Coen

Sam Houston State Park near Lake Charles offers a wonderfully scenic opportunity to get away from it all. It's one of several parks that invite you this summer to enjoy the great outdoors.

- **The Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge** offers hiking, biking, berry picking, bird watching, boating and other recreational activities off La. 14 near Lake Arthur. The refuge is open daily from sunrise to sunset. **The Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge** in Franklin takes visitors into the woods, as well, including the habitat of the Louisiana black bear. Fishing, boating, wildlife observation and photography and hunting are allowed.
- **Try canoeing.** Lake Fausse Point State Park rents canoes with a designated canoe trail and Chicot State Park near Ville Platte rents boats and canoes as well and offers an 8-mile canoe trail.
- Take a trip back in time and visit the newly reopened **Fort Pike State Historic Site** on U.S. 90 east of New Orleans. In addition to the pre-Civil War fort that's a blast to explore with kids, you can view the plaque honoring the memory of Native American Huithli Emathla, also known as "Jumper," who died at the barracks in 1838.
- **Fourth of July events** at nearby state parks include a 10 a.m. Mushroom Hike and a 7 p.m. reptile talk at the Louisiana State Arboretum in Ville Platte and Animal Games for ages 8 and up at 10 a.m. at Sam Houston Jones State Park near Lake Charles.

www.greatoutdoorsmonth.org
www.nwf.org/rrcampzone
<http://www.crt.state.la.us>

Festivals this weekend

June 26-28: The Squire Creek Louisiana Peach Festival in Ruston is one of the longest and most popular agricultural festivals in the state. In addition to headliner Ricky Skaggs performing, there will be lots of live music, a parade, rodeo, artisans and, of course, peaches. In Beauregard, south of Ruston, you can celebrate watermelons and participate in seed-spitting contests at the Beauregard Watermelon Festival.

www.louisianapeachfestival.org

www.beauregardwatermelonfestival.com

Summer reading

If you're out in the woods enjoying the Great American Backyard Campout, try reading something to get your imagination flying and your heart pumping.

New Orleans detective Rick Bentz keeps seeing his wife, Jennifer, everywhere in Lisa Jackson's latest novel, *Malice*. There's only one problem, Jennifer died 12 years ago. The ghostly sightings keep happening, eventually leading to a series of murders connected to Jennifer's past, plus Bentz's new wife has a few secrets of her own.

For young readers, try *The Haunting of Derek Stone*, a new series by Tony Abbott, also set in South Louisiana. Fourteen-year-old Derek is smart, chubby and talking to dead people.

It all happens after a tragic train accident on the Red River and the suspense builds with each book. The first three are now available: *City of the Dead*, *Bayou Dogs* and *The Red House*.

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